

## HOW TO ENSURE AN EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY REMOVAL TDM

*Accurate and plentiful information, supported by thorough discussion are key components of high quality Team Decisionmaking meetings and decisions. It is essential that every TDM examines as much relevant information as possible. While the TDM occurs very quickly after an emergency after-hours removal, all details about the precipitating event, safety issues and the removal must be available at the meeting. The TDM team must determine if the child/youth can safely return home, or if not, what the placement and custody of the child/youth will be while efforts toward reunification are initiated. Unless expectations are clear, Emergency Removal TDM meetings may suffer from limited information and fragmentary documentation, due to the urgency of the situations and time constraints. Following are suggestions to ensure that Emergency Removal TDM meetings occur with maximum information, and thus, are as effective as possible.*

### **1. DON'T WAIT FOR THE DAY STAFF TO INVESTIGATE.**

When a child/youth must be removed from home after-hours because of imminent threats to his/her safety, it is critical that certain basic investigative activities occur immediately. Family to Family principles dictate that a public child welfare social worker should accompany law enforcement for emergency situations when a child/youth's removal appears likely. The rationale for the partnership is that the social worker can acquire needed information, attend to the child/youth's immediate emotional issues and explain to the parents/caregivers child welfare's role/responsibilities, including specifics about the TDM meeting. However, whether the child/youth's removal is handled by the police alone or in partnership with social workers, the child welfare agency's need for information remains the same. Key information must be available when the TDM meeting is held on the next business day following an after-hours removal/placement. A quality TDM depends upon the team having sufficient information to assess the safety concerns 'in the light of day' to make a sound decision about the need for continued out-of-home care and court action.

### **2. DEFINE MINIMUM AFTER-HOURS INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES.**

At a minimum, the after-hours worker must interview the following people at the time of the emergency, or in the brief window between the removal and the TDM: the child/youth, his/her parents or other caregivers, any involved law enforcement personnel, and others who were present at the time of the incident leading to the removal. Whenever possible, s/he should interview key relatives, close family friends and other involved parties who may have information about the family's current situation. The safety and risk assessment tool must reflect the initial investigative findings and immediate safety concerns that resulted in the child/youth's removal. The after-hours staff must review the family's history with the child welfare system and conduct preliminary criminal record checks of parents and all adults living in the child/youth's home as well. All of this information is critical to holding an effective TDM the next morning.

### **3. SUPPORT WORKERS BY ESTABLISHING AN INFRASTRUCTURE.**

Agency leadership must establish a solid infrastructure to support the morning-after TDM process. Both internal agency processes and coordination with the Court around initial orders and hearings are required. After-hours workers must be able to count on the availability of protected next-morning TDM time slots for emergency removals, in order to invite families and other TDM attendees while in the field. The availability of a facilitator and a meeting room convenient to the family must be assured. A simple notification process for other TDM participants, e.g. homefinding and other agency support staff and community representatives can be created. The agency must communicate with court personnel about TDM practice, including the need to hold a meeting before the initial court hearing. The agency may need to negotiate with the Court to ensure that its deadlines for the filing of petitions and its hearing times are compatible with the need to hold a quality TDM meeting before court action is taken.

### **4. DON'T LOSE INFORMATION IN THE HAND-OFF.**

It is the responsibility of the after-hours worker to explain the TDM process to parents, and to encourage them to attend and to bring support persons to the next-day meeting. The worker must also notify appropriate persons within the child welfare agency that an Emergency Removal TDM is needed, and provide necessary information. (Voice or e-mail communication often works well for such after-hours tasks.) Ideally, the after-hours worker will attend the TDM meeting and present all of the information s/he has gathered. However, if this is not possible, it is imperative that all information relating to the child/youth's removal, family history etc. is given to the social worker who assumes responsibility for the case that morning. A worker-to-worker discussion at the point of hand-off, even if by telephone or email, and an exchange of notes and reports in advance of the TDM, is an excellent option. Designated supervisory backup may also be necessary to ensure full sharing of information prior to the TDM. It may also be possible for the after-hours worker to participate in the TDM by telephone. The goal, of course, is to maximize the sharing of all available information so that the best possible recommendation can be made by the TDM team.

### **5. REMEMBER THAT SOME CRISES DON'T OCCUR AT NIGHT...AND SOME TDMs SHOULDN'T WAIT UNTIL TOMORROW.**

Not all emergency removals occur after normal working hours. Sometimes a crisis erupts during the day. The best TDM units are ready to respond with a safe and comfortable place for children to wait while a TDM meeting is held during the same working day. In this way, children are not needlessly traumatized by an out-of-home care placement if the team is able to develop a viable safety plan at the initial TDM meeting. Even if circumstances dictate an immediate removal of the child(ren) during daytime hours, we should strive to hold the TDM that same day. It is wise to stagger facilitators' working hours to allow for late-day or after- hours meetings, in order to accommodate families and maintain the integrity of the TDM process.

